

FEMA Approves Over \$142 Million for Schools Affected by Earthquakes

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The sum includes \$24.4 million to repair schools in Guánica, Mayagüez, Peñuelas, Ponce, San Germán and Yauco

GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico – The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) allocated over \$24.4 million during October and November to repair and reinforce various schools in the South and West regions of Puerto Rico that experienced structural damage caused by the 2020 earthquakes. To date, over \$142 million has been obligated to the Puerto Rico Department of Education for 115 permanent work projects that address damage related to the tremors.

Due to the amount of structural damage caused by the earthquakes, most of the allocated funds will be used for mitigation works such as installing supports and steel structural reinforcements to protect the buildings in case of a future seismic event.

“Investing in construction works related to education has a ripple effect in Puerto Rico’s recovery. Although it’s true that the construction industry plays a vital role in any country’s economy, when the works relate to education, the impact is even greater because the education of children and youths is one of our most important assets, it is the future of Puerto Rico,” said FEMA Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator for Puerto Rico, José G. Baquero.

The funds include nearly \$1.2 million to repair the Segundo Ruiz Belvis elementary school – built during the 1940’s – over \$2.7 million for the Eugenio María de Hostos High School and nearly \$3.9 million for the Dr. Pedro Perea Fajardo Vocational Superior Public School, all three located in Mayagüez. Between the three campuses there is an enrollment of approximately 1,870 students who will benefit from the reconstructed spaces.

“School infrastructure improvement work is at the top of our work agenda through our Reconstruction Office. We have moved forward with several auctions of these



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projects which will allow permanent improvements to begin at the schools. Our vision is to make school environments safe and comfortable in a way that facilitates better outcomes for our students,” said the Acting Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Education, Eliezer Ramos Parés.

Another school building that was earmarked to receive federal funding was the Josefa Vélez Bauzá High School at the Cotto neighborhood in Peñuelas. This is the only high school in town and the third in the southern region with the greatest school enrollment with over 700 students. With the obligation of nearly \$2.9 million, funds were budgeted to reinforce shear walls and columns with steel beams and supports. “This is the best news I’ve received,” said the school’s Director, Miguel Rodríguez. “The school is a safe area, the only space where we provide meals and safety to many students. Also, this allows us to continue the expansion that we had planned,” he added.

Likewise, Peñuelas Mayor Gregory González Souchet commented that the allocation of funds for the repair of schools is fundamental in the reconstruction aspects of the municipality. “We are aware that each job takes time. We are confident that the reconstruction of our schools will be carried out in a short time and that our youth will be able to return to their classrooms regularly,” the mayor said.

In addition, funding approved to Ponce includes nearly \$2.1 million for the Eugenio Le Compte Benitez, over \$2.1 for the Manuel González Pató Middle School at la Rambla urbanization, \$1.9 million for Bethzaida Velázquez Andújar High School at the Las Delicias sector and over \$1.4 million for Aurea E. Rivera Collazo Elementary School, located at the El Madrigal neighborhood.

All four schools have similar damage –broken walls and columns and damage to their facade and common areas. As in the other schools, most of the allocation will cover mitigation works to reinforce the columns and shear walls to reduce possible damage in case of a future earthquake.

Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, Executive Director of the Central Office of Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience (COR3), said, this multi-million-dollar obligation will have a significant impact not only on the earthquake recovery process, but also on the lives of thousands of students who are eager to resume their school life by returning to their classrooms. “Our team at COR3 will continue to assist in these



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efforts to provide school communities with resilient and safe spaces that allow for the socioeconomic development of Puerto Rico”, he added.

For more information about Puerto Rico’s recovery from the earthquakes, visit fema.gov/disaster/4773 and recuperacion.pr. Follow us on social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr y [@COR3pr](https://Twitter.com/COR3pr).



PONCE, Puerto Rico (November 16, 2021) – The funding approved to Ponce includes nearly \$2.1 million for the Eugenio Le Compte Benitez, over \$2.1 for the Manuel González Pató Middle School at la Rambla urbanization, \$1.9 million for Bethzaida Velázquez Andújar High School at the Las Delicias sector and over \$1.4 million for Aurea E. Rivera Collazo Elementary School, located at the El Madrigal neighborhood. All four schools have similar damage –broken walls and columns and damage to their facade and common areas. Photo FEMA / Eduardo Martínez





MAYAGÜEZ, Puerto Rico (November 16, 2021) – The funds include nearly \$1.2 million to repair the Segundo Ruiz Belvis elementary school – built during the 1940's – over \$2.7 million for the Eugenio María de Hostos High School and nearly \$3.9 million for the Dr. Pedro Perea Fajardo Vocational Superior Public School, all three located in Mayagüez. Between the three campuses there is an enrollment of approximately 1,870 students who will benefit from the reconstructed spaces. Photo FEMA / Lorraine Valle

